

## Leopold Wrasse: A portrait

by Donald L. McCaleb (M.A. ED '70)

**O**n a hot San Joaquin Valley day in October 1936, ag professor Harold Wilson wiped the sweat from his forehead and turned his dusty state-issue Chevy onto the oiled dirt road leading north out of Caruthers. He was on a mission from Cal Poly.

Five miles out of town, he drove into the yard of an unpainted shack and honked the horn. When no one came out to meet him, he walked across and opened the screen door.

Inside, it was dim. Copies of the *Fresno Republican* and paper trays of raisins were stacked neatly to the ceiling, covering the windows. Wilson heard someone behind him and turned to greet the object of his visit — a slightly built old man wearing only khaki work pants. His hair was clean but ill-cut, his skin leathery, his face and neck covered with a moustache and beard.

It was the first visit by Wilson to the vineyard owned by Leopold Wrasse, the German immigrant who eventually became the first great benefactor of Cal Poly agriculture students.

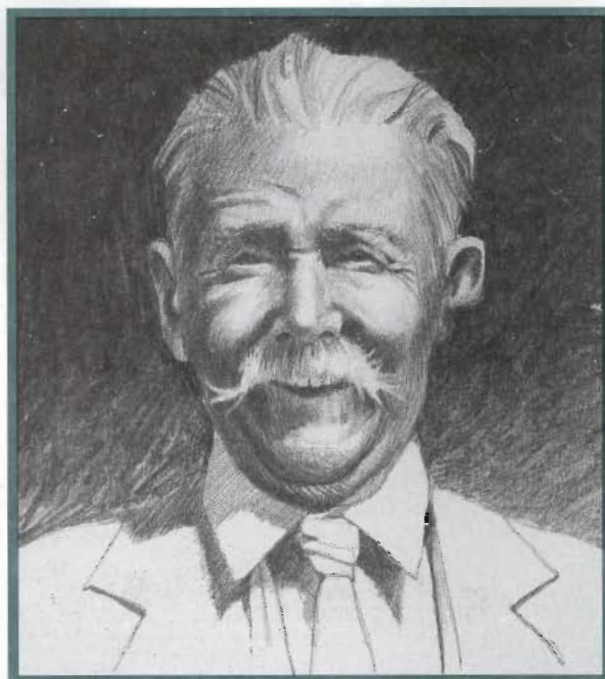
Wilson recalls that he had first met Wrasse a few months earlier during a Future Farmers of America gathering at Cal Poly. Afterward, President Julian McPhee asked Wilson to go to Caruthers and bring Wrasse to campus, and the relationship between the university and the former carpenter grew closer.

Those who knew him described Wrasse as a Christian who revered the Sermon on the Mount but didn't believe in churches, a loner who loved his rigorous life among the grapevines, a frugal man who wanted to instill in young people a respect for agriculture, hard work, and thrift.

Relating Wrasse's colorful life story during a 1961 campus dinner honoring his friend's memory, the late Fresno mayor Arthur L. Selland described Wrasse as an eccentric.

"A bachelor until his death, he had a yearly income of more than \$80,000, yet lived on \$7.50 a month for food and clothing," said Selland. "His main diet consisted of dried raisins and bread, with occasionally a box of graham crackers or fresh fruit and vegetables."

Selland said Wrasse amassed a fortune through a variety of investments, including life insurance policies, savings accounts, and first mortgages.



*Leopold Wrasse (Sketch by Robert Reynolds)*

In addition to his gifts to Cal Poly (starting with a student loan fund in 1938), he donated thousands of dollars to the FFA, 4-H clubs, the Red Cross, and the Salvation Army. And until World War II he sent \$1,800 per month to relatives in Germany.

Following Wrasse's death at age 96 in 1945, it took more than 10 years to untangle legal problems before his will could be executed. When they were resolved, Wrasse had left more than \$500,000 — all but \$40,000 of his estate — to Cal Poly.

Since 1957, when students first received \$500 scholarships from the Wrasse Trust Funds, an estimated 5,200 awards valued at almost \$3.7 million have helped prepare Cal Poly graduates for agriculturally related careers.

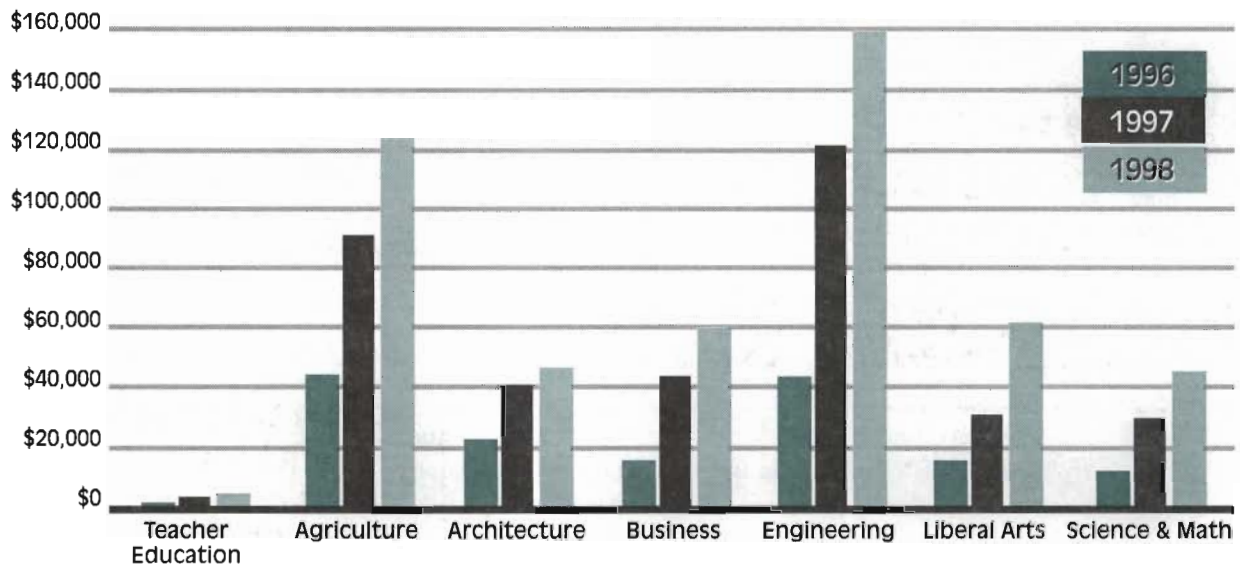
Prudent investments have increased Wrasse's gift to just under \$4 million. Last year alone 175 students were awarded \$1,000 each from the Leopold Wrasse Scholarship program. Smaller numbers of grants came from two other programs, the Special Wrasse Scholarships (for outstanding first-year agriculture students) and the Dean's Discretionary Scholarships.

For 60 years Leopold Wrasse's kindness and generosity have been helping students reach their life goals. As the writer of one university publication put it a few years back, "His undying monument exists in the lives of Cal Poly men and women." **CP**

## Cal Poly Fund again shows increase

**C**al Poly alumni once again increased their giving to the colleges and the University Center for Teacher Education over the six-month period from July 1 through December 31. A total of \$501,351 as of December 31 provided a 38.7% increase over the 1996-97 total of \$361,444 in the same areas. The total in 1995-96 was \$158,575. For more information on how you can contribute to the Cal Poly Fund, call us at 805/756-6448. **CP**

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## GIFTS

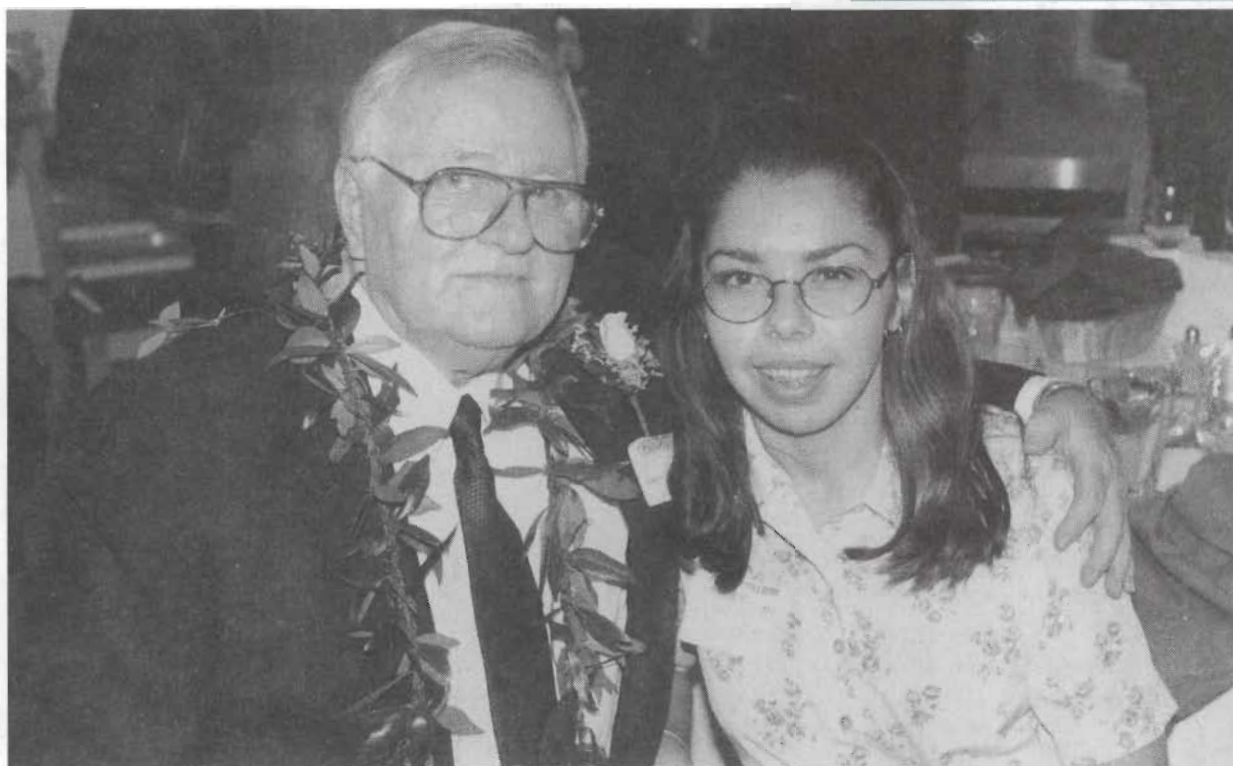
• **Nestle Food Co.** donated \$405,000 worth of scientific equipment and supplies to Cal Poly's food science and nutrition program, enabling the creation of a state-of-the-art Food Science Lab that Professor Joe Montecalvo calls "the pride of the California State University system." With equipment such as gas and high-pressure liquid chromatography units, students can analyze the fat content of foods in classes that teach food chemistry and food analysis in a hands-on approach. "Most universities that have such equipment are research-based, and the closest undergraduate students get to it is through a

demonstration by a technician," says Montecalvo.

• **The Foodsters**, a Northern California association of food industry executives whose membership includes many Cal Poly alumni, has endowed a \$12,000 scholarship fund in the College of Agriculture to educate future industry leaders. This year \$750 will be awarded to a student in the Food Science and Nutrition Department interested in working in the Northern California's food processing industry. The goal is to raise the fund to \$50,000 and increase the annual student award to \$2,000.

• The parent of a Cal Poly alum made an **anonymous gift of \$300,000** in appreciated securities to fund a charitable gift annuity that will make fixed income payments to the donor for her lifetime, enabling her to increase her previous income from these assets by a factor of five, avoid capital gains taxes on a significant portion of her appreciation in the assets and receive favorable tax treatment on the remainder, and earn a substantial charitable income tax deduction. After her death, the remaining funds will create an endowment to provide support to the College of Engineering. **CP**





## Owen L. Servatius Scholarship

*Retired Professor Owen Servatius and the recipient of the first Owen L. Servatius Scholarship, Elena Salguero-Alcantar, at the Homecoming weekend dinner honoring both. The Servatius Scholarship recognizes College of Business students with good grades who demonstrate financial need and good citizenship, with preference going to a student who is the first family member to attend a four-year institution. Servatius retired from Cal Poly in 1983 after 36 years of service to the university. He was an assistant to former President Julian McPhee, taught business, and was acting dean of the School of Business and Social Sciences.*

*(Photo by David Wood)*



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## Morris presents gifts

Don Morris (University Center for Teacher Education professor emeritus) and his wife, Jean, stand in the Administration Building lobby in front of the plaque they restored and presented to the university last fall. A commendation to Cal Poly by the U.S. Navy for training naval personnel during World War II, the plaque was awarded to the university circa 1943 and was recovered by Morris several years later when he was director of student housing.

The Morrises have also created an endowment with a \$10,000 gift of appreciated securities to support the Athletic Hall of Fame, and are in the process of enlarging, laminating, and matting the photos of the 50 Hall of Fame members to complement plaques hanging in the second-floor hallway of Mott Gym. During his 42 years at Cal Poly, Morris was instrumental in developing the Athletic Hall of Fame concept, subsequently serving as president and currently as a member of the selection committee.

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85	\$5,400	10.5%
90	\$5,860	12.0%

\*Based upon a single beneficiary.  
Rates are slightly lower when  
two beneficiaries are designated.

For additional information, contact Michael McCormack, Director of Planned Giving, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0481 (phone 805/756-7125; fax 805/756-2711).